



**Sibling Rivalry**  
**By Tim Jezard**

Fighting or arguing amongst siblings is a normal and common behaviour that occurs in most, if not all families, with one or more siblings. It can be verbal or physical in nature and is best resolved without parental intervention. Kids will often compete for attention or toys when they are young and this typically settles as they get older and their language and social skills improve.

**Why does it happen?**

In addition to jealousy and competition, there are other reasons as to why kids argue or fight. A child's needs vary depending on their age and this reflects how they relate to one another. Toddlers, for instance, are often protective of their possessions and may react strongly if a baby picks up one of their toys or other belongings. School age children have a strong sense of morality and may not understand why kids of different ages are treated differently. For teenagers, independence is everything, and taking care of younger siblings or simply spending time with them can be a cause of conflict. A child's individual temperament and personality will also contribute to how well they interact with their brother or sister. Children with special needs or disabilities often demand more of their parents time and this too can also affect the family dynamic result in sibling rivalry. Finally, the way parents model problem solving and conflict resolution sets a strong example for kids.

**What can we do about it?**

The first step is not to jump in and try to solve the problem for the kids. Where possible, allow the kids to resolve the situation for themselves. This promotes the development of good problem solving; a fundamental life skill. Only step in if you believe there is a risk of physical harm. If they are swearing or using bad language, encourage them to use more appropriate words. At all costs, it is best to work with your kids to resolve conflict rather than for them.

If the situation is getting heated, separate them until they calm down. This will allow them to resolve the incident in a better mental state. It is also important not to put too much emphasis on who is to blame; anyone involved is partly responsible. It is best to try to establish a "win-win" scenario so that everyone gains something eg. if each child wants the same toy, redirect them to a game or something they can both play. As kids learn to cope with conflict, they are learning vital life skills such as empathy, compromise and negotiation.

**How to help kids get along**

Establish rules for responsible behaviour (your non-negotiables). This may include name calling, swearing, yelling, etc. If you believe your child is mature enough, allow them to have some input into the rules as well as what the consequences are should they break them. Make one-on-one time for each of your children based on their individual needs. Kids need to know they are important to you!

Schedule family meetings on a regular basis when conflict is apparent. This provides an opportunity for all family members to air their grievances and to problem solve ways to re-establish family harmony.

Be attuned to when kids need time apart. If you recognise this is the case, arrange for one of your kids to go to a friend's house and spend some one-on-one time with the other/s.

For more information, visit the following websites:

<http://www.parentingideas.com.au/Parents/Sibling-Rivalry>

<http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/fighting.html>

**Biography:**

Tim has been a registered psychologist for over 10 years. He specialises in working with children and adolescents, anxiety, depression and addictions. He currently manages a counselling service in a large independent school in Melbourne and works part time in private practice. He is married with three kids under 10 and lives in the inner west of Melbourne. He is an active member of Melbourne Victory and enjoys running, travelling, cooking and live music.